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REVIEW

A scoping review on community and parent involvement in quality education in rural primary schools

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Abstract

Quality education is crucial for local economic development, and a lack of it widens the rural-urban gap, particularly in rural, deprived schools. As a result, there has been an increased emphasis on school-based management through decentralisation to achieve quality education. Having community and parents as part of the strategic constituents for its achievement, research is thus needed to clarify the element of quality education that the community and parents are involved in at primary schools in rural areas. However, there is little research on this element. This scoping review examined literature from 2006 to 2025 to map out evidence and identify the gaps. Using the 2005 Framework of Arksey and Malley, forty-six studies met the inclusion criteria. The review revealed that there is little research on quality education in rural areas, with a predominant focus on parents than the community and less representation of children's voices. Many parents and community members highly supported infrastructure, finances, attending meetings, teacher supervision and incentives. The significance of the review underscores the critical need for more comprehensive research that includes diverse stakeholder perspectives to enhance quality education initiatives in rural settings.

Keywords Community involvement · Parent involvement · Primary schools · Rural areas

Introduction

This study examines how the community and parents participate in providing quality education in rural areas. Quality education is vital and essential for development in these regions (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) 2021). The United Nations considers quality education a principal goal to transform

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the world by 2030. By quality education, the United Nations (UN) means ‘‘equitable and standard education for all that promotes lifelong learning and the desire to acquire knowledge’’ (What Is Quality Education? | Leverage Edu n.d.). This suggests that quality education is a human right that should be accessible to everyone, regardless of their location (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and United Nations Children’s Fund UNICEF 2007). In the context of human rights, Tomasevski stated that the right to education should include the 4a´S: accessibility, availability, acceptability, and adaptability (Tomasevski 2001). Tomasevski closely linked acceptability with quality education, arguing that the structure and content of education must be acceptable to both parents and children (relevant, culturally appropriate, and of good quality), and respect freedom. Quality education is a subjective and debated concept with no single definition, though most definitions are closely related (Chapman and Adams 2002; Cheng and Cheung 1997; Quality Primary Education: - UNICEF n.d.). Understanding varies, and different indicators are used to define quality education (Cheng and Cheung 1997). Quality education is defined as simply achieving ¨the inputs (number of teachers, amount of teacher training, number of textbooks), processes (amount of direct instructional time, extent of textbook usage), outputs (test scores, graduation rates), and outcomes (performance in subsequent employment) “(Chapman and Adams 2002, p. 2). A similar study described the ¨set of elements in the inputs, processes, and outputs as needing to satisfy the requirements and expectations of the strategic constituents (parents, policymakers, school management committees and teachers),” (Cheng and Tam 1997). Building on this understanding, this review adopts the definition of quality education as one requiring the active inclusion and participation of strategic constituents, particularly parents and community members, in achieving equitable, relevant, and meaningful educational outcomes. This suggests that quality education may be based on school-based management (which can include stakeholder participation involving the community and parents) through decentralisation in education (Cheng and Cheung 1997). However, other scholars have refuted that school-based management has a direct impact on quality education and student improvement (Caldwell 2005). Nevertheless, UNICEF (1999) has proposed decentralisation as a means to achieve quality education for all in its State of the World Children Report, because decentralisation will collectively organise and develop institutions that are close to children and families. This review adopts this definition of quality education, which requires the input of strategic constituents in achieving its success.

Access to high-quality education in rural areas is a crucial element of local economic development, as it enables rural communities to adapt to a rapidly changing environment. Without access to such education, there is a risk of widening the rural-urban gap (OECD 2021). Rural areas often face shortages of (high-quality) schools and teachers, limited pedagogical materials, inadequate school infrastructure, and irregular attendance, which contribute to lower educational achievements (International Labour Organisation (ILO) 2017). Among the OECD countries, the challenges faced by rural schools in terms of quality are evident in three areas: a) Resources; including a greater shortage of educational materials, fewer computers connected to the internet, and a lack of qualified teaching staff; b) Teacher and parent behaviour; characterised by lower participation of teachers in collaborative professional learning,

less initiative by parents to discuss their children's progress, and higher teacher turnover; c) Student characteristics, outcomes, and behaviour; such as lower test scores, lower socioeconomic status, higher rates of truancy, a weaker sense of belonging, and reduced self-efficacy (OECD 2021). Similarly, in Nigeria, Helen et al. (2020) highlight the challenges to quality and equity in education in rural areas; teachers complain of neglect, low salaries, a lack of expertise, poor equipment, and supervisors' disregard for their financial responsibilities. Community elders also accuse school authorities of not involving parents and communities in managing the school. Additionally, the children who are central to this quality education are expected to work to support the difficult circumstances of their families, which disrupts their education and leads to absenteeism, with parents complaining about the conflicting roles of children attending school and working at home (ILO 2017; Munje and Mncube 2018; Namukwaya and Kibirige 2019). Another study argues that the high level of school dropout among children in primary schools in rural areas is caused by parents who overwork their children, prioritising money over education (Drajea and O'Sullivan 2014). These have led to unpleasant accusations between teachers and parents, as the former accuse the latter of not having time to assist their children with homework and schoolwork, while the latter, on the other hand, implicate the teachers as obstacles to their involvement, claiming that they are illiterate and that their presence is not needed in schools (Ishihara-Brito 2013; Marin and Bocoș 2017; Renth et al. 2015; Thomas-Lester 2017; Williams 2009). These circumstances and interruptions influence the quality of education. Discussions and policies on quality education are all directed towards the best interests of children to improve learners' achievement. According to UNICEF (n.d.), this relies on strong community-based school systems supported by community members and local governments.

As a result of ongoing challenges in rural education, such as limited resources, poor infrastructure, and low teacher participation, as well as the need to enhance learners' outcomes, many discussions and programmes have been initiated to involve the community and parents in primary education to improve its quality (Kendall 2007). Kendall (2007) further noted that these programmes have established formal structures, such as School Committees and Parent-Teacher Associations, where parents and community members can actively participate in their involvement. With this understanding of stakeholder participation through decentralisation explained, how do the community and parents contribute to quality education in the rural areas? Based on this understanding, this study sought to identify elements of quality education and determine which of these elements have consequences for the participation of the community and parents. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2000) has identified five key elements of quality education: learner support at home, educational content, learning environment, learning process, and educational outcomes. In this regard, they explained that learners must be healthy, well-nourished and supported by their families and communities; the learning environment must be safe and healthy with adequate resources and facilities, educational content should be relevant to learners, teaching methods should be presented in a well-managed classroom, and learning outcomes should result in participation in society. The Norwegian Agency for Development (NORAD) (Norad.no 2015) identified six key elements in common: teachers and teaching methods, educational content, learning environ-

ment, school management, preconditions for pupils, and funding and organisation. Some researchers have generally adopted these elements when assessing the quality of basic education (Thinley 2021).

Given this, which of the elements of quality education, as listed by UNICEF and NORAD, can communities and parents enact their involvement? (Kendall 2007) reported that parental and community involvement in schools affect the quality of education in many ways: ¨providing an oversight of school budgeting and teacher attendance and performance; managing student attendance and homework; providing resources (labour, money, etc.) for school buildings, teacher hiring, and other school infrastructure and services; and advocating at local and national levels for changes that may improve educational access, retention, and completion" (pp. 704). Furthermore, the results of Sumarsono et al. (2016) reveal similar areas in which parents and communities participate in improving the quality of education in basic schools. These are learning content, students' affairs, facilities and infrastructure, school management, finance, and school personnel.

Having identified the areas in which parents and communities can or do participate in quality education, this review seeks to find out what the literature says about the elements of quality education that communities and parents take part in within rural areas. There has been a rapid increase among researchers in the interest of parental involvement and the quality of education of their children, resulting in several literature reviews, meta-analyses, and rapid and systematic reviews. Several meta-analyses and systematic reviews have been done on the relationship between parent involvement and student academic achievement (Fan and Chen 2001; Jeynes 2005, 2007; Sénéchal and Young 2008), parent and teachers' interactions in primary schools (Honingh et al. 2020) and family-school connections (Semke and Sheridan 2011). Many of these studies and research based on involvement and partnerships have focused extensively on urban settings (Jeynes 2005; Reynolds 2001; Semke and Sheridan 2011). However, reviews rarely focus on primary education, with the study population comprising community members and parents in rural areas, and the distinct ways in which rural parents and community members contribute to educational processes, especially in settings with high deprivation. In addition, scoping reviews which have been conducted on primary education/basic schools have focused on play pedagogies in kindergarten education (Pyle et al. 2017), physical education teachers from 1990 to 2017 (McEvoy et al. 2015), international mindedness and related concepts in music education (Norman 2022). All have centred in the urban areas as well.

Therefore, a scoping review analysing literature on the element of quality education in rural areas is important. This review expands this growing body of work by mapping out the roles, barriers, and facilitators related to community and parental involvement in quality education. Using internationally recognised frameworks from UNICEF and NORAD, it categorises participation across six key elements: learner support, learning environment, curriculum, school management, personnel, and finances. Unlike previous scoping reviews of parental and community member involvement, this review focuses specifically on rural primary education, adopts a broader definition of stakeholder participation, and aims to bridge the empirical and policy-relevant gaps in the literature. In doing so, this review not only identifies research gaps but also clarifies the scope and distribution of evidence, offers com-

parative insights across countries and continents, and informs future interventions based on community-school partnerships. Arksey and O'Malley (2005, p. 21) identified four possible reasons for conducting a scoping review: (1) to examine the extent, range and nature of research activity, (2) to determine the value of undertaking a full systematic review, (3) to summarise and disseminate research findings, and (4) to identify research gaps in the existing literature. This scoping review aims to pinpoint research gaps in quality education in primary schools, focusing on aspects where community members and parents in rural areas can participate, and to explore what inhibits and facilitates their involvement.

Community and parent participation discourse and forum

The aim to provide quality education has led many countries to decentralise their primary educational systems and involve parents and communities at the local level. Such partnerships with communities enhance the quality of education, regardless of location (Alam 2015). Additionally, Project 6 within the INCLUD-ED (Strategies for inclusion and social cohesion in Europe through education) initiative, which examined the impact of community involvement on schools across Europe, showed significant improvements in a short period, including academic performance in subjects like mathematics and the mother tongue (Díez et al. 2011). A community has been defined as a group of people with shared interests or goals. Community can be categorised into three distinct types. The first is the geographic community, defined by the residential location of its members, such as a village or district. The second classification is ethnic, racial, and religious communities, where membership is determined by ethnic, racial, or religious affiliations, often transcending geographical boundaries. The third type comprises communities founded on shared family or educational concerns, which include parents' associations and similar bodies that are based on families shared concern for the welfare of students (Bray 2001).

In developed countries, researchers primarily focus on promoting parental involvement to achieve higher academic success, whereas less developed countries have concentrated on encouraging community participation in the management and financing of schools (Suzuki 2002). In most literature, parents and community members are regarded as separate entities; however, in reality, they have an overlapping sphere of influence, as explained by Epstein (Epstein et al. 2018) in the context of home-family-community partnerships. Community members include parents and other stakeholders within the community. Parents have two roles—individual functions at home and collective functions within schools (Carolan-Silva 2011).

With this decentralisation, some governments have mandated the community to be part of the decision-making and management of primary schools. As a result, they have created formalised structures or bodies where the community and parents can participate in the quality of education (Russell 2009). One of the most common avenues for parent and community participation in schools in developing countries is the School Management Committee. Additionally, other practices, such as the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA), are common among African countries, while Asociación Comunal para la Educación (ACE) is found primarily in Latin American countries (Russell 2009). A review of international practices in community involvement in

school management reveals that in developed countries, primary schools often have parents or school councils as governing bodies, playing significant roles in decision-making and management (Sliwka and Istance 2006). This is manifested in many of the OECD countries with formal structures like parent associations, parents' councils (elected bodies of parents) and school councils comprising parent councils and teacher representatives, which typically wield considerable influence, particularly in shaping local curricula, determining budgets and participating in the recruitment and selection of teachers (Sliwka and Istance 2006).

Now, defining rural areas has been a subject of controversy among studies conducted in these regions. There is no universally accepted definition of rural, and several variations exist for this concept. Countries define rural in diverse ways, which can vary significantly depending on the context. Most rural areas are defined based on geography, population, and socioeconomic factors. In this study, we examined all three aspects, focusing on areas with fewer resources and low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Method

A scoping review provides a "preliminary assessment of the potential size and scope of available research literature. It aims to identify the nature and extent of research evidence (usually including ongoing research)" (Grant and Booth 2009, p. 101). A scoping review aims to rapidly map evidence that underpins a research topic or a particular area (Arksey and O'Malley 2005). This study sought to clarify the nature of elements of quality education that communities and parents contribute to in rural primary schools, disseminate the findings and reveal gaps. This scoping review adopted the five-stage framework of Arksey and O'Malley (Arksey and O'Malley 2005): 1) identifying the research questions, 2) identifying relevant studies, 3) selecting studies, 4) charting the data, and 5) collating, summarising, and reporting results (Arksey and O'Malley 2005, p. 22). With limited and scant research on community and parent involvement in achieving quality education in rural primary schools, this framework was particularly appropriate. It allowed us to thoroughly examine the extent and nature of existing evidence while highlighting gaps that future research could address.

Identifying the research questions

The following research questions guided the study.

(1) In which elements of the quality of education do the community members and parents participate in rural areas? Under this question, the review analyses the (a) methods employed in each study and also looks at elements of quality of education by (b) the number of available studies per element and (c) by country. We then report on the community's and parents' findings regarding each component of quality education.

Table 1 Keyword categories used in the search strategy

AND AND AND

KEYWORDS 1	KEYWORDS 2	KEYWORDS3	KEYWORDS4	
Community participation	Parent participation	Primary education/school	Rural areas	OR
Community involvement	Parent involvement	Basic education/school	Rural	
Community engagement	Parent engagement		Rural schools	OR

Table 2 Summary of search results across three academic databases

Search keywords	Database search (number of articles retrieved and years searched)		
	ERIC	EDUCATION DATABASE (PROQUEST)	WEB OF SCIENCE
"Community Participation" Or "Community Involvement" And "Parent Participation" Or "Parent Involvement" And "Primary Education" Or "Basic Education" And "Rural Areas"	3942 (2006–2021)	8363 (2006–2021)	
Commun*engagement and parent* engagement and primary school or basic school and rural areas	(-)	(-)	89 (2006–2021)
Communit*involvement and parent* involvement and primary school or basic school and rural areas	(-)	(-)	286
("Community Participation" OR "Community Involvement" OR "Community engagement") AND ("Parent Participation" OR "Parent Involvement" OR "Parent Engagement") AND ("Primary Education" OR "Basic Education OR "Primary schools") AND ("Rural Areas" OR "Rural" OR "Rural School")	513(2022–2025)	(-)	534(2022–2025)

(2) What hinders or facilitates community members' and parental involvement in the quality of education in rural areas? The second question explores the obstacles to and facilitators of family and parental involvement that exist in rural areas based on the analysis of the reviewed studies.

Identifying relevant studies

The search strategy was based on predefined keywords to gather articles for the review. These keywords are commonly used by researchers in their studies. First, a search was conducted on Google Scholar to identify similar or related keywords in articles. These related keywords were then used to search for articles for the study. As shown in Table 1, there are four sets of keywords arranged in columns, with the Boolean operator OR used within each column, and the operator AND used to connect the columns of the four sets. Table 2 displays the combined keywords from Table

1, illustrating how they were entered into each database and the results obtained, with the search limited to the years 2006–2025.

Table 2 shows the number of articles retrieved using different keyword search combinations across three academic databases: ERIC, Education Database (ProQuest), and Web of Science, covering publications from 2006 to 2025. Each search string used Boolean operators and truncation (e.g., involvement) to expand the search and find studies relevant to community and parent involvement in rural primary education. The dash (–) indicates where data were not retrieved or not applicable for that specific search term in the given database.

Study selection

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were considered for the search. A period of the last 15 years (2006–2021) was selected for the search of current literature on the topic. This period aimed to help us retrieve studies conducted in rural areas that focus on limited research regarding quality education. Beginning in 2006, we were able to capture literature produced after the *Education for All (EFA)* Global Monitoring Reports and during the transition toward the *Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)*, when parental and community involvement became central to international debates on access, equity, and quality in primary education. This starting point ensured that the review reflects contemporary educational systems and frameworks. The study encompassed all international literature focusing on rural schools and parent/community involvement. The review selected only empirical studies to ensure that the findings were based on observed practices and evidence regarding how community members and parents are involved in quality education in rural areas. As shown in Table 3, all publication types were included: peer-reviewed articles, educational books, reports, dissertations, scientific magazines, press services, professional magazines, minutes, presentations, and others. They were only in English. Studies were

Table 3 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Database	Eric, educational database web of science	
Timeframe	2006–2025	
Publication types	Peer-reviewed articles, educational reports, books, reports, dissertations, scientific magazines, press services, professional magazines, presentations and minutes and others	
Types of studies	Empirical studies	
Focus	Rural areas, parents, community involvement, barriers, facilitators, primary and basic schools, disadvantaged schools, quality of education	Urban areas, sub-urban schools, Universities, secondary schools, health problems, private schools, schools with intervention programs
Language	English	Other languages
Target population	Teachers, parents, headteachers and teachers SMC'S, community members, district directors, students, NGO's	

included regardless of their methodologies and country. The focus was on rural areas, parent and community involvement, barriers, facilitators, primary or basic schools, parents, community members, students, board of directors, school management council (SMC), and other stakeholders. Schools that already had existing or ongoing programmes/interventions were eliminated to clearly identify what parents and community members do in their communities. However, studies that made comparisons between schools with intervention programmes and those without were included. In this review, "rural" was defined using internationally recognised frameworks (OECD 2011; UNESCO 2015) as areas with low population density, limited access to infrastructure and services, and socioeconomic disadvantages. Across the included studies (Europe, North America, sub-Saharan Africa, and Asia), these characteristics were consistently observed, with local differences in terminology or emphasis on agricultural dependence or resource constraints. All selected studies focused on rural areas that were socially and economically deprived, ensuring comparability across contexts.

The search was conducted across three databases: These three databases mentioned above offer broad coverage of peer-reviewed journals and other resources in the fields of education and the social sciences. The search was updated in ERIC databases and Web of Science to include the period from 2022 to 2025. This aimed to identify current findings and developments related to community and parent involvement in rural primary schools. We limited our search to educational materials within the databases and excluded all unrelated materials and research from other disciplines. This restriction narrowed our results to the key papers included in the search databases.

Table 3 illustrates the inclusion and exclusion criteria that guided the study selection process in this review. The criteria helped ensure the relevance of the studies included in the final analysis.

We relied on the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) statement (Moher et al. n.d.) for the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Figure 1 shows the study selection process, including procedures for searching databases, screening texts, and selecting eligible articles for inclusion. The last database search was conducted in May 2021. ERIC and the education databases were searched across all available categories. And for the Web of Science database, I refined the discipline categories at the search stage to include educational research, anthropology, educational sciences, social sciences, and interdisciplinary fields. I imported all the articles (titles and citations) into Mendeley. Using the software, I employed the "check duplicate" function to identify all duplicated articles and subsequently deleted them. Additionally, I conducted a manual review of titles, volumes, pages, and authors to remove any hidden duplicates. The total number of articles retrieved from the databases was 12,680. To capture the most recent literature, the search was updated to cover the period from 2022 to 2025, using ERIC and Web of Science with the same keywords and refinements. This update yielded 1067 records (513 from ERIC and 534 from Web of Science).

In total, the combined searches produced 13,759 records. After removing 698 duplicates, 13,061 records remained. Screening of titles and abstracts resulted in the exclusion of 12,815 irrelevant articles, leaving 246 full-text articles for assessment.

Of these, 200 were excluded because they focused on urban or secondary contexts, private schools, were irrelevant to the research questions, or the full text was unavailable. Ultimately, 46 studies were included in the final review (41 from 2006 to 2021 and 5 from 2022 to 2025). All authors agreed on the keywords for the data search. The fourth author proposed an additional database for inclusion, which was approved by the second and third authors. The first author conducted the database searches, screened the texts, and selected the eligible articles. The second and third authors reviewed all 46 articles to confirm their eligibility. The first author drafted the manuscript with contributions from the second, third, and fourth authors.

Figure 1 presents the flowchart diagram.

Figure 1, shown in Appendix A, displays the flowchart diagram of the study selection process. The figure visually represents the steps taken to screen, select, and analyse the articles included in this scoping review.

Data charting

As described by Arksey and O'Malley (2005), this approach is a "descriptive-analytical" method within the narrative tradition, serving as a common analytical framework that collects standard information applied to all the primary studies reviewed (p. 26) (Arksey and O'Malley 2005). Additionally, they stated that data charting should often include a mixture of general information about the research and specific facts (Arksey and O'Malley 2005). However, deciding which categories to add to the chart is up to the researcher (Daudt et al. 2013). In this paper, the categories included author, year, country, methodology, participants, elements of quality education, barriers, facilitators, the purpose of the research, and the research results. Data was charted using Excel, and detailed information on the data chart can be found in the supplementary material ("S1 Table").

"S1 Table" Overview of data on included articles.

S1 Table presents the categories used to chart data from the reviewed studies. A summary of key study details, including author, year, country, methodology, and participants, is included here, along with elements of quality education, barriers, facilitators, the purpose of the research, and the results of the research.

Collating, summarising and reporting the results

In line with Arksey and O'Malley's framework, this is the fifth part of the scoping review process (Arksey and O'Malley 2005). The following section summarises, reports on, and discusses the findings of the 46 studies. This part addressed the two questions at hand. We sought to analyse reviewed studies by identifying themes related to quality education and displaying the countries in which these studies have been conducted. We settled on themes used by Sumarsono et al. (2016) because Kendall (2007) focuses more on parent and community collective function in the school, but themes from the study by Sumarsono et al. (2016) can analyse parents' individual function at home as well as the parent and community collective function in the school. Secondly, the themes identified in Sumarsono et al. (2016) study significantly overlap with widely accepted concepts in the context of quality education and stake-

holder participation, making them relevant to the choice of this study. Furthermore, the themes presented by the former are similar to the elements of quality education from UNICEF AND NORAD that are taken as a starting point in this study, and these frameworks are internationally recognised and align closely with the multidimensional view of quality education adopted in this review. The following themes were used for the review, as shown in Table 4. Learner affairs/support at home, education/learning content, learning environment, school management, finance, and school personnel management. Additionally, Russell's decision points were incorporated as subthemes under certain elements because they were identified through practices observed in studies on stakeholder involvement in quality education and aligned with the main themes, thereby complementing and expanding the thematic categories in a structured manner (Russell 2009). Decision points were curriculum development, setting class hours and calendar, maintaining, and building of school facilities, supplying, and buying school materials, attending meetings, setting goals and development plan, teacher training activities, hiring, and firing of teachers, supervise and evaluate teachers and lastly teacher incentives and payment of salaries. We discussed the literature to report the findings on how communities and parents were involved in the quality of education. The second question also addressed the number of studies conducted on barriers and facilitators. Here, after reviewing the studies, themes were developed to report the findings.

Table 4 summarises the main themes and sub-themes identified in the literature on community and parent involvement in quality education. It provides a framework for

Table 4 Themes of quality education and community/parent involvement

Theme	Sub-theme(s)	Description
Learner Affairs/ Support at Home	- Academic activities at home - Non-academic activities at home - Parents' interest in children's advancement	Focuses on parental involvement in supporting academic activities, non-academic activities, and overall interest in children's educational growth.
Educational Content	- Resource personnel - Curriculum development	Involvement of parents and community members in providing resources, assisting with curriculum, and contributing cultural knowledge.
Learning Environment	- Maintaining and building school facilities - Sanitation and wellbeing - Supplying and buying school materials	Participation in maintaining the physical environment, creating a safe and healthy learning space, and supporting material provision.
School Management	- Attending meetings - Setting goals and development plans - Decision-making	Community and parent involvement in school management through attending meetings, setting goals, and making key decisions.
Finance	- Fundraising - Teacher incentives and salaries	Financial contributions to support school activities, teacher incentives, and salary supplementation in rural settings.
School Personnel Management	- Teacher training activities - recruitment and termination of teachers - Supervision and evaluation of teachers	Community and parent roles in supporting teacher training, involvement in hiring processes, and holding teachers accountable.

understanding how stakeholders contribute to various elements of education in rural settings.

Results

The Fig. 2 hereafter shows that the majority of reviewed articles on the elements of quality education were conducted in North America (United States of America, 13; Canada, 1; Guatemala, 1) and Africa (Ghana, 4; South Africa, 2; Malawi, 1; Ethiopia, 2; Zimbabwe, 1; Kenya, 1; and Botswana, 2). One study was carried out in each of the other continents: Europe (Romania), South America (Paraguay), and Oceania (New Zealand). Additionally, five articles were found in Asia (China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and India). In total, 36 articles focus on the elements of quality education. See ("S1 Table").

Figure 2 shows the distribution of studies by continent, highlighting the global representation of research on community and parent involvement in rural education. This figure can be found in Appendix B.

Participants and data collection methods from the various studies

The review analysed the methodology used in the studies to determine the trend in parent and community involvement. The participants and data collection methods were analysed, and the results showed that 36 studies included parents as participants. 14 studies listed parents only as their participants, while 11 studies involved parents and SMC/PTA/community members. In these studies, SMC/PTA represented the community members in the villages. Six out of the 10 studies randomly selected community members from the villages to participate, aiming to gather their views and perspectives on parent and community involvement. Teachers and/or headteachers appeared in 27 articles (with either parent and teacher/headteacher (7) or parent, teacher/headteacher and SMC/PTA/community members (10), or teacher and students (1) or teachers and headteachers only (5), or parent, teacher/headteacher and student (1), or headteacher/teacher, school governing boards/learners (1), or headteacher/teacher, SMC/PTA, community member (1), or parent, Village Education Committee (VEC) and teacher/headteacher (1)). Only four articles included primary school students as participants. The most common data collection tool employed is the individual interview (cited in 37 articles), with a few instances of pair or focus group discussions (cited in 14 articles). Surveys and questionnaires were also employed (10 articles). Document analysis (14) and observation (6) were found to pair with other data collection tools mentioned above (interviews, surveys, focus groups, questionnaires). (See "S1 Table").

Elements of quality education that the community and parents participate in within rural areas

Student or learner's affairs at home

Parent participation in students' affairs from the articles reviewed manifests in the form of supporting academic and non-academic activities at home and developing the interests and talents of children. This theme also addressed the participation of community members at home.

Academic activities at home This subtheme discussed parents' involvement in school-related activities that the child brings home. I found twenty-one articles that explored the type of academic assistance rural parents offer their children at home. The research revealed that most parents considered their involvement in educational matters outside school as the only way they could support their children's education (Ram 2018; Rodriguez-Kufner 2016). Common activities included helping with homework, reading to children, encouraging independent reading, establishing home routines, and assisting them in understanding academic tasks (Abraha 2022; Eberhardt 2024; Ram 2018). For instance, parents set a regular time in the evening for reading, read labels together, and provided drawing and painting materials (Place 2013). Similar patterns were observed in other rural contexts, where parents supervised homework and gave emotional encouragement but struggled with new curriculum content (Ngozwana et al. 2024; Seleka and Masoabi 2024). In Bangladesh, literate parents assisted with reading, checked results, reviewed exam scripts, and solved math problems, whereas those in remote or illiterate communities depended on extended families for support (Ahmed et al. 2024; Chowdhury and Afrin 2019)

Other studies reported that parents assisted learning by reading to children from early childhood, holding homework discussions, and creating regular study schedules (Case 2009; Ishihara-Brito 2013; Jamhar and Hastuti 2019; Stevenson 2014). Some parents relieved children from household chores so they could study (Kong et al. 2008; Rodriguez-Kufner 2016; Swift-Morgan n.d.). However, illiteracy limited many parents' ability to assist directly, leading some to seek neighbours' help (Erlendsdóttir et al. 2022; Rodriguez-Kufner 2016). Conversely, several studies showed that children in poor rural households were burdened with chores or livestock care, which reduced time for homework (Haines 2012; Munje and Mncube 2018). In contrast, immigrant families in rural Oregon used their cultural and linguistic resources to foster bilingual development, showing that extended families can enhance rather than hinder learning (Díaz Lara et al. 2024). Despite these efforts, many teachers and headteachers expressed dissatisfaction with parental involvement in academic activities, noting that parents were often occupied with household duties and childcare (Chowdhury and Afrin 2019; Pansiri and Bulawa 2013; Thomas-Lester 2017). Parents tended to participate more in extracurricular events, such as sports, than in schoolwork (Stevenson 2014). Likewise, other studies observed low participation in home-based educational activities overall (Carolan-Silva 2011; Marin and Bocoş 2017). In summary, while rural parents show commitment to supporting

their children's learning at home, their participation is often constrained by illiteracy, poverty, and competing domestic responsibilities. These barriers are discussed in greater detail in section "What are the barriers to community and parent involvement in quality education in rural areas", which shapes both the nature and level of their involvement.

Non-academic activities at home These are activities that could have an indirect educational component at home. Regarding the area of non-academic activities at home, many researchers do not perceive it as a support for the quality of education. Only three articles explored this sub-theme of non-academic activities at home. These are also extracurricular activities found both at home and in the community. For instance, some families engaged their children in non-academic activities, such as community service, lifestyle improvements, health-related services, and other church programs (Case 2009). In rural areas of South Africa, parents also contributed to non-academic education by engaging children in community service and cultural traditions, which served as practical learning environments (Ngozwana et al. 2024). In addition, other parents developed their children's non-academic needs by fostering them with Indigenous knowledge and skills, not just school matters (Ram 2018). Similarly, in Ethiopia, parents actively integrated Indigenous knowledge into their children's upbringing, which reinforced cultural identity and skills beyond formal education (Abraha 2022). Furthermore, some rural parents assist their children by playing board games and taking their children to town libraries (Place 2013). In Pakistan, extended families also played a role in passing on cultural and traditional knowledge, reinforcing community ties and teaching children practical life skills, such as farming and cooking (Ahmed et al. 2024). Overall, the review yielded relatively limited findings regarding parents' involvement in non-academic activities in rural areas, suggesting a lesser concern among researchers in this area.

Parents' interest in children's advancement Besides the academic and non-academic activities at home, interest in children's advancement and development promotes the quality of education (Sumarsono et al. 2016). Ten articles examined this sub-theme to analyse parents' interest in children's advancement. In several studies, parents demonstrated their interest by expressing their love for learning, fostering good study habits, and demanding information about children's progress (Ahmed et al. 2024; Stevenson 2014). Similarly, in South Africa, parents emphasised their desire to see their children excel, even when they could not directly assist with academic tasks. They frequently expressed love and support for learning but also sought regular updates from teachers on their children's progress (Ngozwana et al. 2024). In some communities, parents inspired their children to value education because they were unable to help with homework (Carolan-Silva 2011). In Ethiopia, despite limited formal support, parents encouraged their children to embrace education as a tool for future success, even as they struggled with their own literacy (Abraha 2022). Other parents showed their interest and commitment by encouraging them to be confident, express their opinions openly, ask questions in class, and handle challenging situations (Ram 2018). Additionally, some parents reviewed their children's books and

monitored their progress (Ishihara-Brito 2013; Jamhar and Hastuti 2019). Moreover, many parents saw their involvement as vital in promoting their children's educational success and social engagement (Hopson 2010; Kgosidialwa 2010). Similarly, in rural communities in the U.S., even immigrant parents who faced systemic barriers to full involvement in schooling found ways to support their children's educational and social development through participation in extracurricular activities and community events (Díaz Lara et al. 2024). Some emphasised the importance of education for their children's future by explaining how they felt inferior to urban residents and advising their children to be attentive in class (Kong et al. 2008; Place 2013).

On the contrary, several studies revealed that many parents were indifferent to the quality of their children's education and allowed them to decide for themselves whether to continue their education or to drop out (Ishihara-Brito 2013). In such cases, children were granted significant autonomy in deciding on their schooling (Ishihara-Brito 2013). In rural Pakistan, some parents allowed their children to make these decisions independently, as they did not see the immediate value in education and were preoccupied with survival (Ahmed et al. 2024). And in some instances, children were responsible for their academic learning and decision to pursue their schooling (Kong et al. 2008). Most of these parents, burdened by poverty and lack of resources, were unable to support their children's education and left the responsibility to the children themselves, which affected the children's future aspirations (Ngozwana et al. 2024). This suggests that many parents in rural areas are not interested in their children's advancement and care less about their future (Renth et al. 2015). This general disinterest in children's futures has the potential to shorten children's ambitions.

Community participation at home In all the articles included for the study, including topics on community participation, only one reported that some individuals from the community assisted with children's affairs at home. Data from one study reported that some committed individuals accepted responsibility for visiting students' homes to ensure that everyone attended school (Sharma et al. 2016). Furthermore, some civil organisations, composed of village youths who have completed diplomas and degrees, took on the responsibility of guiding, teaching, and engaging students in school-related matters. These acts by motivational individuals and civil organisations depict the concern that community members have for the future of children.

Educational content

Three sub-themes were analysed under this category: parents and community members becoming resource people, developing inspiring classrooms and curricula, and teachers setting class hours/calendars. Fifteen articles explored community and parent involvement in educational content.

Resource personnel The review identified eight articles that examined community and parents as a resource in classroom settings. For example, research revealed that

some parents were involved in the classroom as a resource by helping with musical, dramatic, or cultural performances (Hornby and Witte 2010). In some communities, parents were actively engaged in similar extracurricular activities, supporting school plays, festivals, and musical events, further enhancing children's social learning experiences (Ngozwana et al. 2024). In some schools, parents assisted teachers in the classroom during the painting and art sessions (Peterson 2008). Similarly, other studies reported that the majority of parents sacrificed their time to assist teachers and students with educational activities (Case 2009; Ram 2018; Stevenson 2014). Likewise, other research found that parents accepted the invitation to engage with students in class by giving accounts of their life, reading to students and volunteering (Preston 2013). Furthermore, one study found that parents and community members served as resources by sharing their traditional and cultural skills with schoolchildren (Haines 2012). However, another study evinced that community members did not avail themselves of imparting knowledge and skills about the area's culture and occupations (Asare 2011). The reviewed studies affirmed parents' and community members' willingness to serve as resources in the classroom.

Curriculum development This was to discuss parents and community members having their voices heard in the curriculum that should be part of what their children are studying. Seven articles were explored under this sub-theme. For instance, one study found that parents were actively involved in curriculum development that could be employed at home, working together with teachers in schools to ameliorate the educational development of children (Marin and Bocoş 2017). Similarly, in some rural settings, parents worked collaboratively with teachers to ensure that the curriculum was practical and accessible, adapting it to the specific needs of their children and community (Ngozwana et al. 2024).

Similarly, another study reported that some parents assisted with literacy and numeracy, and preparing teaching materials (Hornby and Witte 2010). In some areas, parents with educational backgrounds played a key role in providing supplementary materials and resources to aid classroom learning, which further enriched the curriculum (Abraha 2022). All these were parents who could read and write. Teachers, on the other hand, were willing to engage parents in school activities. For instance, 82% of teachers were willing to collaborate in non-Opportunity scholarship schools (non-OSP) with parents and community members in discussing teaching and learning in school (Nishimura 2019). In several instances, teachers also reported that parental involvement was critical to their own teaching practices, helping them refine lessons and incorporate community perspectives into the curriculum (Díaz Lara et al. 2024). In another study, parents were concerned with the student's academic performance and therefore made sure that the curriculum was structured to prepare children to pass the Kenyan Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE). This was so because parents were responsible for the payment of the salary of teachers due to delays and inadequate payment by the government (Nishimura 2019).

Although some findings show parents' and community members' participation in school curriculum matters, most studies indicate otherwise. In many rural schools,

teachers reported that parents were unwilling to discuss curriculum issues or children's performance, and none assisted with classroom duties (Chikoko 2008; Jamhar and Hastuti 2019; Pansiri and Bulawa 2013). Other studies similarly found no cooperation in lesson development or instruction (Nishimura, 2019; Swift-Morgan n.d.). One teacher remarked, "There is no viable role for a parent in the classroom," while others said, "Parents are not educated", "have nothing to contribute to the teaching lesson" (Swift-Morgan n.d., p. 354). Overall, most rural parents remained uninvolved in curriculum activities.

Setting class hours and calendar None of the literature reviewed showed community and parent setting class hours and calendars for the schools.

Learning environment

In this review, the learning environment includes the facilities and infrastructure, which are safe, healthy, and protective, such as the development of school gardens, construction of classrooms, sanitation, and learning aids. Three sub-themes fall under this main theme:

Maintaining and building of school facilities Eighteen articles discussed community and parent support in maintaining and building school facilities. The findings revealed that the community and parents contributed to schools by supplying labour and building materials for construction and maintenance (Asare 2011; Bekoe et al. 2013; Carolan-Silva 2011; Chowdhury and Afrin 2019; Donkor and Waek 2018; Essuman and Akyeampong 2011; Ishihara-Brito 2013, Nishimura, 2019; Peterson 2008; Preston 2013; Stevenson 2014, Swift-Morgan n.d.; Taniguchi and Hirakawa 2016). For example, in southern Ethiopia, community members supported schools by supplying labour and materials for infrastructure projects (Swift-Morgan n.d.). Similarly, parents and community members in rural settings sacrificed their time and limited resources to make the school environment conducive to learning, often volunteering to support classroom construction and sanitation repairs (Ngozwana et al. 2024). One father remarked, "We are willing to give whatever we can to support the school … we are very poor, but we can lend our labour and materials," highlighting the earnest community participation, which included collecting and transporting building materials and preparing food for labourers (Swift-Morgan n.d., p. 352).

Comparable efforts were observed across regions. In Pakistan, community-led initiatives for school infrastructure faced financial challenges, yet parents continued to offer labour for toilet construction and classroom maintenance (Ahmed et al. 2024). In Guatemala, despite illiteracy and post-war hardship, parents improved learning conditions by providing labour and preparing meals for children (Ishihara-Brito 2013). Likewise, in Paraguay, parents' commissions ensured school development through provision of labour and materials (Carolan-Silva 2011). However, in Ethiopia, poverty limited material contributions, shifting infrastructure responsibilities to community leaders and external organisations (Abraha 2022). Parents' voluntary

work remained crucial, as one study showed that most families offered both labour and materials to sustain a conducive environment (Stevenson 2014). Among rural immigrant families in the U.S., parents also engaged in school improvement, though their participation was constrained by time and resources (Díaz Lara et al. 2024). Community volunteerism was further illustrated by instances where local skills such as carpentry, driving, and electrical work were donated to school projects (Preston 2013). Parents contributed volunteer labour and materials to build facilities like snack stands and broadcasting towers for student activities (Preston 2013). Taniguchi and Hirakawa (2016) revealed that parental involvement varied by school achievement level. In high-achieving schools in Malawi, parents maintained desks, repaired teachers' houses, and ensured conducive learning conditions, while low-achieving schools struggled to fund facility repairs (Taniguchi and Hirakawa 2016). This shows that community commitment correlates with school performance, as well-maintained facilities enhance educational outcomes (Ngozwana et al. 2024). Although studies in northern Ghana indicated relatively low parental assistance (Donkor and Waek 2018), building and maintaining school structures still received strong community support despite widespread poverty.

Sanitation and wellbeing In some areas, community members were also interested in beautifying and ensuring the upkeep and care of the environment. Research conducted indicates that parents used their "knowledge in gardening to construct a garden on the former early childhood playground for students' perusal during science, physical education and other instructions tied to the outside environment" (Peterson 2008, p. 79). Others weeded and cut tall grasses around the school building because children were not old enough (Kgosidialwa 2010). In addition, rural communities have shown resilience in maintaining their surroundings despite limited resources, often relying on volunteer labour to sustain safe and hygienic school grounds (Abraha 2022). Similarly, some parents acquired new benches for the school to make the environment friendly for the children (Ram 2018). These small but impactful contributions reflect parents' desire to create an environment that fosters learning, even when schools lack formal resources (Díaz Lara et al. 2024). Further examples of parents' involvement encompassed cleaning the school, replacing broken windowpanes and taps, repairing broken door locks and furniture, painting and assisting wherever there was a need (Haines 2012), building a toilet and supplying furniture (Asare 2011; Essuman and Akyeampong 2011). Research from rural settings further demonstrates that parental and community contributions in maintaining school infrastructure are linked to the overall well-being of students, with parents playing a key role in ensuring safe and healthy learning environments (Ahmed et al. 2024). Research confirms that parents and the community were concerned with the health and welfare of the students (Sharma et al. 2016).

Supplying and buying school materials Three articles were reviewed under this subtheme. All of them suggested that the community and parents provided teaching and education material (Asare 2011; Bekoe et al. 2013; Kong et al. 2008). For example, in China, with parents' inability to support their children's learning at home, some rural

parents adopted a strategy by ¨equipping children with new and proper materials such as pens and books to make the physical environment friendly" (Kong et al. 2008, p. 65). In rural Malawi, some parents attempted to provide books or basic resources to support learning at home, but the majority could not due to poverty (Erlendsdóttir et al. 2022). Their inability to supply resources or materials meant that children had little to work with outside the classroom.

School management

This aspect is achieved by parents and community members participating in the school committee, parents forming and being active in the community of parents and participation in school activities (Sumarsono et al. 2016). Three sub-themes were reviewed on school management: attending meetings, setting goals and development plans and decision-making involvement.

Attending meetings I found eighteen articles focusing on parents and community members attending meetings in rural schools. Parents and community members often participate in activities such as Parent Teacher Organisation) meetings, SMC meetings, conferences, open house events, music performances, class outings, book fairs, Parent nights, extracurricular sports, dance, and tutoring (Ahmed et al. 2024; Asare 2011; Carolan-Silva 2011; Chowdhury and Afrin 2019; Hornby and Witte 2010, 2010; Ishihara-Brito 2013; Ngozwana et al. 2024, Nishimura, 2019; Preston 2013; Ram 2018; Stevenson 2014). However, some studies noted that parents' attendance at meetings and training sessions was low, as they would sign in and leave without fully participating (Sharma et al. 2016; Swift-Morgan n.d.). This pattern was also seen in other rural areas, where logistical issues, work commitments, and limited understanding of meeting goals hindered meaningful participation (Abraha 2022; Díaz Lara et al. 2024). In certain schools, there was no parent group at all 2016).

Setting goals and a development plan I found thirteen articles that explored this subtheme, which focuses on community and parental involvement in school development and improvement. The review revealed that parents and community members actively engaged in school management through Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and School Management Committees (SMCs) (Hornby and Witte 2010, Nishimura, 2019; Swift-Morgan n.d.; Taniguchi and Hirakawa 2016). PTAs were the primary channel for parental participation (Stevenson 2014). For instance, among the 22 schools examined by Hornby and Witte (2010), 17 had PTAs where parents discussed school matters. Through SMCs and PTAs, parents in high-achieving schools contributed to the construction, implementation, and evaluation of school improvement programs (Taniguchi and Hirakawa 2016). Parent commissions also participated in defining school goals and identifying institutional needs (Carolan-Silva 2011; Swift-Morgan n.d.). In some contexts, community members collaborated with District and Educational Directorates to address school improvement issues such as enrollment and attendance (Asare 2011), while SMCs developed retention plans to ensure full

enrollment (Sharma et al. 2016). Parents and community members also engaged in developing school policies, setting priorities, and financial planning, thereby enhancing school management and overall educational quality (Ahmed et al. 2024; Essuman and Akyeampong 2011; Ngozwana et al. 2024).

Teachers often initiate meetings with parents to discuss academic performance, school attendance, pupil behaviour, and irregular attendance (Nishimura 2019). Other meetings, including goal-setting conferences, individualised education plan (IEP) meetings, and parent-teacher-child discussions, fostered collaboration and strengthened school programs (Hornby and Witte 2010). In rural contexts, proactive participation in SMC/PTA meetings facilitated school planning, infrastructure development, and student support programs (Abraha 2022; Díaz Lara et al. 2024). Parents also served on school governing bodies, finance committees, and disciplinary, security, and safety committees, where their contributions enhanced school functionality, discipline, and effective use of funds (Haines 2012, p. 136). Although some parents joined PTAs, Parent Teacher Organisations (PTOs, and advisory councils that influenced policy and safety decisions, others remained uninvolved due to poverty and cultural perceptions of school authority. Overall, the literature underscores that sustained collaboration between schools, parents, and communities is vital for effective school development and improvement.

Decision-making Fourteen articles examined community and parental involvement in decision-making in rural areas. Thirteen revealed that community members and parents participated in school decision-making (Asare 2011; Carolan-Silva 2011; Case 2009; Chikoko 2008; Donkor and Waek 2018; Essuman and Akyeampong 2011; Haines 2012; Hornby and Witte 2010; Jefferson 2015; Nishimura 2019; Swift-Morgan n.d.; Taniguchi and Hirakawa 2016). Areas of participation included defending school location and seeking government support (Carolan-Silva 2011), securing financial contributions (Chikoko 2008; Essuman and Akyeampong 2011; Nishimura 2019; Taniguchi and Hirakawa 2016), and appointing teachers (Nishimura 2019). However, other studies reported that some parents and community members were reluctant to engage in school management, hold personnel accountable, or address financial misconduct. Parents in low-achieving schools often "passively listened to the headteachers" (Taniguchi and Hirakawa 2016, p. 494). Hornby and Witte (2010) noted that five out of 22 schools lacked PTAs or SMCs. Similarly, Case (2009) reported that five of twelve participants were not involved in any decision-making. In another study, parents stated that "Parent Teacher Organisation (PTO) was not for everyone …." and felt excluded, believing PTOs were closer to teachers and administration (Stevenson 2014, p. 83). Some parents also viewed serving on advisory committees as unrelated to community involvement (Preston 2013), and meetings with school directors drew limited attention (Jefferson 2015). A few parents were satisfied with school decisions (Place 2013), yet others felt excluded. Parent governors in several schools stated that their participation was unnecessary because national regulations limited their role in administration, class size, and discipline (Chikoko 2008). In another study, all participants agreed that schools never engaged them in decision-making about curriculum or educational issues (Jamhar and Hastuti 2019, p.

7), and the schools admitted to not collaborating with community associations. Similarly, parents' commissions were kept distant from school management (Chowdhury and Afrin 2019). Although there were areas where parents and community members contributed, overall participation in decision-making remained limited, especially in low-achieving rural schools.

Financial aspect

Eighteen articles examined this element of quality education, focusing on how parents and community members provided financial support through mobilising, raising, and allocating funds for educational and developmental activities. Most rural parents endeavoured to assist schools. One study found that all participants identified financial contribution as the main form of parental and community support (Swift-Morgan n.d.). Interviews with school heads highlighted that financial issues were central to school–parent partnerships (Chikoko 2008). In many schools, parents were responsible for paying salaries. For example, "the small and remote schools … mobilise a relatively high amount of money from parents to hire teachers" (Nishimura, 2019, p. 401). Because government salaries were low and often delayed, parents made "per student cash payment to the school … to supplement salaries for teachers and other personnel" (Nishimura 2019, p. 403). Similarly, as financial responsibility shifted to local communities, parents became the main funding source (Chikoko 2008). Parent commissions also raised funds through local festivals and petitions to government agencies (Carolan-Silva 2011). Taniguchi and Hirakawa (2016) observed that while socioeconomic levels were similar, parents in high-achieving schools supported teacher hiring, extra classes, mock exams, and school development, unlike those in low-achieving schools.

Other parents raised funds through community auction sales (Preston 2013), school-run shops (Peterson 2008), and PTAs (Case 2009). These funds sponsored field trips, sports, cultural and academic competitions, and end-of-year award functions (Haines 2012) as well as development projects (Essuman and Akyeampong 2011). Some studies found that financial contributions were targeted toward pressing needs such as classroom materials, infrastructure, and extracurricular activities (Ngozwana et al. 2024; Ahmed et al. 2024). In other contexts, parents pooled resources for emergency repairs or learning materials when budgets were insufficient, showing proactive support for education quality (Abraha 2022; Díaz Lara et al. 2024). However, some parents cited poverty as a challenge (discussed in section "What are the barriers to community and parent involvement in quality education in rural areas") (Nishimura 2019; Swift-Morgan n.d.; Taniguchi and Hirakawa 2016), while others were indifferent despite being asked (Haines 2012). Overall, most rural parents and community members contributed to improving schools despite economic hardship.

School personnel management

Four sub-themes were analysed under school personnel management. These are training activities organised by the cooperation between the schools and committees (PTA, community members, parents), recruitment and termination of teachers, supervising and evaluating teachers, and lastly, providing teacher incentives and paying salaries.

Teacher training activities Only two articles were found to discuss teacher training activities. One study revealed that parents organised and directed teacher training activities in the school (Ram 2018). Hornby and Witte (2010) indicated that when parents were interviewed about their involvement in teacher professional development sessions, 17 schools reported that parents had not been involved. Only four schools reported that such involvement had occurred, and it had been done when pupils had diabetes, autism, Asperger's syndrome, and dyslexia. Importantly, these activities took place only when specific needs arose and were not part of continuous professional development. Overall, professional development related to parent involvement and broader teacher training remained limited.

Recruitment and termination of teachers I found three articles on this sub-theme. Two of the articles examined indicated that parents and community members were involved in the recruitment of teachers (Nishimura 2019; Taniguchi and Hirakawa 2016). The other article reported that parents were not involved in teacher appointments but only raised concerns with head teachers when problems such as poor teacher performance, student discipline issues, or declining instructional quality were perceived (Chikoko 2008). Parents and community members in rural areas appear to have little say in the kind of teachers sent to their children's schools.

Supervise and evaluate teachers I found eight articles that explored parents' and community members' involvement under this sub-theme. The review showed that PTA and SMCs were involved in supervising, evaluating, and holding teachers accountable (Bekoe et al. 2013; Carolan-Silva 2011; Chikoko 2008; Chowdhury and Afrin 2019; Essuman and Akyeampong 2011; Nishimura 2019; Sharma et al. 2016; Swift-Morgan n.d.; Taniguchi and Hirakawa 2016). The articles examined reveal that PTA executives and SMC monitored teachers by sneaking into the classroom to inspect their attendance and punctuality and then reporting to the headteachers (Chowdhury and Afrin 2019; Essuman and Akyeampong 2011; Sharma et al. 2016). Teachers were held liable for school budgets and fraudulent operations (Carolan-Silva 2011). However, Donkor et al. (Donkor and Waek 2018) explained that PTAs and SMCs did not have the capacity or know-how to monitor teachers. Generally,

parents and community members were highly concerned about teachers' attentiveness to students, commitment to teaching, and the quality of instruction at the school.

Teacher incentives and payment of salaries Eight articles explored teacher incentives and payment salaries by parents and community members. This element of quality education was in the form of supplementing salaries and payment of salaries during delays (Essuman and Akyeampong 2011; Nishimura 2019; Swift-Morgan n.d.; Taniguchi and Hirakawa 2016), providing accommodation (Asare 2011; Essuman and Akyeampong 2011; Taniguchi and Hirakawa 2016), providing foodstuffs and giving them lands for farms (Asare 2011), rewarding hardworking teachers (Nishimura, 2019), and lastly limiting classroom size and valuing teachers (Bekoe et al. 2013). This suggests parents and community members were supportive and concerned with the teacher's well-being.

The facilitators of community and parent involvement in rural areas

Communication

Communication is a crucial factor in promoting parent and community involvement in basic education. According to Preston et al. (2019), teachers employed various written communication strategies, including newsletters, blogs, emails, handouts, and personal notes, to inform and engage parents. Additionally, half of the teachers surveyed in the study reported communicating with parents via telephone. Hornby and Witte (2010) emphasised the importance of clear communication about school complaint procedures and flexible scheduling of parent-teacher interviews in promoting parent involvement. Parents enacted their involvement through various forms of communication, such as telephone calls, notes, appointments, emails, text messages and informal contact during pickups (Hornby and Witte 2010). Effective communication fosters the expression of feelings and concerns by parents, as teachers encourage communication and expression (Vigo Arrazola and Soriano Bozalongo 2015). Furthermore, another study reported that communication was identified as the main element in facilitating parent involvement by teachers, parents, and administrators alike (Cheairs 2016). Teachers employed various modes of communication, such as sending home written communication, conducting conferences, and holding open house events in the community (Cheairs 2016). Finally, Information sharing was found to be an effective means of encouraging contributions from parents and community members to support the school (Kgosidialwa 2010; Nishimura 2019).

Motivation and engaging activities

Research indicates that motivation plays a crucial role in enhancing parents' and community members' involvement in schools. According to a study, teachers motivate parents to participate in activities such as sharing their talent and stories with students, volunteering, and participating in field trips and theme-based events (Pres-

ton et al. 2019). Research has found that effective teacher-led plans can encourage families to take the initiative in planning and participating in school activities (Vigo Arrazola and Soriano Bozalongo 2015). A close working relationship between teachers and parents, facilitated through the PTA, also increased parent involvement (Eberhardt 2024; Hornby and Witte 2010). Furthermore, some studies noted that parents' frequent participation in school events deepened their partnership, according to teachers (Cheairs 2016; Younger and Grudnoff 2017). The direct invitation from the principal and teachers on the board of trustees significantly encourages parent involvement (Younger and Grudnoff 2017). Parents noted that appreciative attitudes from school staff are a significant motivator for community members to participate in PTA meetings (Swift-Morgan n.d.). As a result, the director's efforts to motivate community members to contribute resources and labour led to the creation of a new school (Swift-Morgan n.d.). Schools that engage with and involve stakeholders, including chiefs, graduates, religious bodies, and local politicians, encourage community members to participate in school activities and support school development initiatives (Nishimura 2019).

Respect and trust

Respect and trust are important constituents of parent and community participation. An SMC member describes trust as the ''spirit of togetherness'' (Nishimura, 2019). Teachers' efforts in their students' success on final exams foster trust in the community (Nishimura 2019). As a result, it strengthens parents' and community participation. Teachers' attitudes, reactions, and respect for parents' and community contributions to schooling can affect parents' perceptions of whether or not to participate (Swift-Morgan n.d.). A study noted that schools identifying, accepting, and integrating culture into the curriculum encouraged parental involvement. For example, in the "Litera school, when specific projects were prepared, the teachers considered the situations of the children, families and the curriculum" (Vigo Arrazola and Soriano Bozalongo 2015, pp. 331). Respect for parents by the schools is essential to connect with parents and community members.

Training

Four studies were found under this theme. Training activities offered in schools for parents increased their participation. Research reveals that teachers talked about available training support at PTA meetings and referred parents to ''specialists who visit the school, such as social workers, nurses, special education teachers'' (Hornby and Witte 2010, p. 775). Teachers adopted measures such as family education through documents, tutorial sessions, or lectures on subjects such as emotional education of children and key issues for parents and stressed mothers (Swift-Morgan n.d.). Teachers organised classes for parents on how to teach different subjects, and this increased parental involvement as parents felt part of the educational process (Cheairs 2016). A study concurred and asserted that the empowerment of the parents, funding, and the Friday counselling sessions given to parents in the ´parent room' increased their

participation (Peterson 2008). This implies that parents' interest stemmed particularly from the training support given by teachers.

What are the barriers to community and parent involvement in quality education in rural areas

Illiteracy

Illiteracy is conceived as one of the principal barriers that militate against parent and community participation in quality education in rural areas. A parent who is incapable of reading and writing is unable to assist their children in academic activities both at home and in school (Matshe 2014). Illiteracy instils fear and a lack of confidence in parents to enact their involvement in school activities and their children's academic success (Chowdhury and Afrin 2019; Younger and Grudnoff 2017). According to a teacher, the only contribution of parents is to bring their children to school and "…… no follow-up or check-up in their homework ……. because some are uneducated and, as such, they don't know how to help the learners study at Home or do their homework". A parent clearly stated, "I don't want to lie to you, I don't do anything about it. In fact, I don't know how to assist my child …. I just ask [them] to look at [their] book, but I don't have any means to help. I didn't go to school". pp. 87 (Munje and Mncube 2018). Similarly, low-income parents were willing to assist their children, but they were uncertain about the ways to aid them in becoming successful (Chikoko 2008; Renth et al. 2015). Likewise, it was opined that parents lacked the knowledge to appreciate the specific curricular information to help with homework (Place 2013). Another study also pointed out that parents were candid about their disinclination and acknowledged their reticence, stemming from a lack of understanding and the inability to be involved in their children's education (Carolan-Silva 2011; Matshe 2014). A different study observed that the SMC and VEC had limited knowledge of their duties and responsibilities, as the majority of them were landless agricultural labourers and daily wage workers, making it challenging to entrust them with certain powers (Donkor and Waek 2018; Narwana 2015). This limited knowledge discouraged parents and community members from holding positions such as secretaries in the SMC (Matshe 2014). Furthermore, Research studies have shown that the language employed in meetings exacerbates parents' and community members' lack of comprehension (Donkor and Waek 2018; Preston et al. 2019; Younger and Grudnoff 2017). For example, a study found that most of the SMCs and VECs stated that the capacity training they received was of little assistance and difficult to recall (Narwana 2015). In addition, some parents complained that the new curriculum differs from the old one and therefore find it difficult to comprehend (Kgosidialwa 2010). Additional studies have also confirmed that parents with low literacy struggle to engage in school meetings or follow instructions from teachers and committees, limiting their ability to contribute meaningfully to school activities and decision-making (Abraha 2022; Ahmed et al. 2024; Díaz Lara et al. 2024; Ngozwana et al. 2024). Parents and community members in rural areas were limited in their school participation due to their limited education.

Lack of time

I found about 10 papers that all agree that the lack of time prevents many parents in rural areas from fully engaging in their children's education. Many parents and community members interviewed complained that their work schedules limited their participation in school activities (Case 2009; Place 2013; Preston et al. 2019; Renth et al. 2015; Younger and Grudnoff 2017). These work schedules were irregular, involving working day and night, holding more than one job, and working long hours (Younger and Grudnoff 2017). Additionally, during planting and harvest seasons, most parents and community members spend all their time on the farms and return home late. and exhausted (Chikoko 2008; Kgosidialwa 2010). Furthermore, parents with large families babysit their children at home during the day (Chowdhury and Afrin 2019; Renth et al. 2015; Younger and Grudnoff 2017). These hindrances and other commitments to sports clubs, churches and other community activities hindered their involvement in school and home activities of their children's education (Lydia and Pansiri 2011; Thomas-Lester 2017).

Poverty

Poverty was another factor that impeded parents' involvement in the quality of education. The reviewed papers revealed that most of the children were living with grandparents and parents who were unemployed (Matshe 2014; Munje and Mncube 2018; Renth et al. 2015). Consequently, unemployment caused most parents to focus on family matters rather than their children's education (Munje and Mncube 2018). For instance, one parent said, "It was difficult for the family to know what was going on in the school because the family did not have internet to check grades (progress) … no money to buy gas to take children back to school and library" (Renth et al. 2015, p. 78). This affected the student's esteem. The school's facilities were in bad condition and in need, and soliciting help from parents to purchase those shortages meant asking too much (Haines 2012). Their economic situation affected their involvement in school activities and the students' esteem (Bekoe et al. 2013; Carolan-Silva 2011; Donkor and Waek 2018; Ishihara-Brito 2013). Additional studies reported that parents in low-income rural areas were often unable to contribute financially or provide learning materials, limiting their engagement in both school programs and homework support (Ngozwana et al. 2024; Abraha 2022; Ahmed et al. 2024). Economic constraints also limited parents' ability to attend school meetings or volunteer, further reducing their participation in school development activities (Díaz Lara et al. 2024).

Lack of respect and cultural barriers

Lack of respect led most parents to not dedicate their time to involve themselves with the schools and teachers. Several studies concur that teachers perceived rural parents as inferior and thus presented themselves as superior to them, leading to the rejection of parent proposals and decisions made without parent input (Narwana 2015; Shim 2018; Williams 2009). A study reveals that schools are culturally unresponsive to poor families (Thomas-Lester 2017). Hierarchical structures like caste, class and

gender impede participation (Sharma et al. 2016). Furthermore, teachers were mostly caste specific, and the school authority did not see any value attached to community participation (Narwana 2015). This was because those in the upper caste declined to choose individuals from the lower castes in positions in the SMCS and VEC committees; meanwhile, most students were from the lower caste (Narwana 2015).

Institutional barriers

Institutional barriers significantly hinder parent and community participation in the educational system. Parents and community members often feel deprived of access to information and space, which leads to their limited participation (Jefferson 2015; Lydia and Pansiri 2011; Preston et al. 2019). Procedures and policies in place discourage parent involvement, with many participants stating they are only encouraged to drop off their children and not enter classrooms (Jefferson 2015; Lydia and Pansiri 2011; Preston et al. 2019). The bureaucratic system within the PTA prevents parents from being actively involved. According to Lydia and Pansiri (2011), 68% of parents surveyed cited a lack of task assignments as the reason for their non-participation. This suggests that institutions also partly obstruct the effective involvement of community members and parents.

Discussion Quality education is essential in bridging the rural-urban divide, yet there seems to be little attention paid to quality education in rural communities. These communities tend to suffer in terms of resources and amenities required to enhance the standard and level of their schools, which amounts to the definition of quality. This review adopts the definition of quality education as one requiring the active inclusion and participation of strategic constituents, particularly parents and community members, in achieving equitable, relevant, and meaningful educational outcomes. After conducting an initial search with keywords in three databases, a manual search was done to gather research on community and parent involvement and quality education. The authors found a large volume of articles from the databases and discussed them among themselves before narrowing down the selection. From Fig. 1, only 46 articles met the inclusion criteria, spanning from 18 countries (S1 Table). The majority of these studies were conducted in the USA (13 articles). This reveals that there is a limited amount of research on this topic in rural areas in various countries worldwide. There is a need to examine quality education, as there has been a significant focus on urban areas in both developed and developing countries.

Another issue that emerges from the data in (S1 Table) is the participants in these various articles included in the study. Most of the research focused mainly on parents' involvement, with few exploring either community involvement or parents and the community. About 34 of the articles had a population of parents. Furthermore, others, which included teachers and headmasters as participants, mainly discussed parents' involvement without addressing any community involvement in their research. Studies with community involvement were mainly found in developing countries, while studies on parent involvement were primarily in developed countries. This divide reflects broader cultural and systemic differences between the Global North and the

Global South. In the Global North, particularly the United States, research traditions and policies emphasise the responsibility of parents as individuals, reflecting cultural values of individualism and accountability (Epstein et al. 2018). By contrast, in the Global South, education is often sustained through collective practices, with communities including extended families, elders, religious groups, and School Management Committees playing crucial roles in providing infrastructure, resources, and support (Bray 2001; Russell 2009).

In countries where both parents and communities play significant roles in education, researchers have nonetheless tended to focus predominantly on parental involvement. This emphasis is crucial, as parents are important actors, but it risks overlooking the substantial contributions that community members can make to rural education. Community participation is not only cultural but also practical in contexts where schools lack state support and depend on collective mobilisation to survive. By concentrating solely on parents, we may overlook the impact of community engagement on improving education in rural schools. The limited research on community involvement has tangible consequences. When communities are not included in the educational process, schools may miss out on essential support from local individuals, particularly in rural areas where government assistance is often insufficient. Moreover, this narrow focus hinders our understanding of how collaboration among parents, community members, and schools can enhance educational outcomes.

A further gap is the notable lack of representation of children's voices in the reviewed studies. While parents and teachers are frequently the main participants, children, the direct recipients of education, are often treated as passive beneficiaries rather than active participants. In the Global North, this reflects the parent–child focus of research, while in the Global South, children's perspectives are usually mediated through parents, elders, or committees rather than heard directly. This exclusion leads to an incomplete picture of how parental and community involvement actually shapes children's experiences of schooling. The few studies that did include students as participants highlight important insights: children often pointed to the burden of household chores, financial pressures, and lack of school resources as barriers to their education, but they also recognised the encouragement and material support they received from parents and community members. Including children's voices would enrich the evidence base by showing how they themselves perceive the support they receive, the challenges they face, and the ways in which both parents and communities influence their learning and well-being. Future studies should therefore explore more deliberately how communities can partner with parents and schools while also centring children's perspectives. Doing so would create a more balanced understanding of quality education as both an individual and collective responsibility, and one that fully recognises children as central stakeholders in their own educational journeys.

The findings show that parents' involvement at home was the most commonly studied form of participation, but with important differences between academic and non-academic activities. Academic activities at home were the most visible in the literature. Many parents assisted children with homework, reading, or establishing routines. However, a divide emerges between the Global North and Global South. The distinction between the Global North and the Global South is not intended to

homogenise countries within each category, but rather to help explain observed differences in research focus, forms of participation, and structural conditions shaping parental and community involvement. In rural areas of the Global North, even most parents with low socioeconomic status could often support children academically, partly because they had higher literacy levels and more access to resources. In rural areas of the Global South, by contrast, many parents lacked formal education, making it difficult to provide direct academic support. Teachers in these contexts frequently criticised parents for low involvement, while parents themselves expressed frustration over illiteracy and heavy household responsibilities. This reveals a systemic gap, as current models of parental involvement assume literacy and available time are conditions not present for many parents in the Global South. Future solutions should therefore include community tutoring schemes, peer-learning initiatives, and adult literacy programs that compensate for these barriers.

In contrast, non-academic activities at home were scarcely addressed in the reviewed literature. Only a handful of studies acknowledged how parents and communities support children through cultural transmission, life skills, or extracurricular engagement. Yet, in many Global South rural contexts, such non-academic contributions may be as important as formal learning, given the limited resources available in schools. The underrepresentation of this theme highlights a research bias that privileges academic achievement while overlooking broader dimensions of child development. Expanding research to include non-academic contributions could shed light on how cultural knowledge, emotional support, and social development impact educational outcomes, particularly in contexts where formal schooling is under-resourced.

Parents' interest in children's advancement also revealed a tension. In some contexts, parents motivated children and monitored progress despite their inability to provide direct academic support. However, in other rural areas, particularly in the Global South, parents have shifted responsibility for educational success onto their children, sometimes granting them autonomy to decide whether to pursue schooling. This indifference, often linked to poverty, lack of opportunity, or cultural norms, creates a critical gap in sustaining children's long-term aspirations. It underscores the need for targeted programs that not only build parents' capacity but also raise awareness of the long-term value of education for families and communities.

Community involvement in children's learning at home was nearly absent in the literature. Aside from isolated cases where dedicated individuals or organisations intervened, little research examined how communities support parental efforts outside of school. This silence highlights another gap, particularly in many rural areas of the Global South, where individual parents face limitations, and communities often collectively step in to fill the gap. However, these contributions remain underresearched and undervalued. Expanding this area of study could uncover scalable models of shared responsibility that better reflect communal traditions in the Global South.

The study highlights the unbalanced nature of research on parents' and community members' involvement in the educational content. Parents and community members are often excluded from participating in the curriculum and calendar settings for schools in rural areas, with only a few acting as resources. The level of parental literacy and influence were key factors in determining involvement, though attitudes

towards the role of parents in the classroom also played a role. The study also found that there is limited research on the input of parents and community members in the curriculum and materials that reflect their way of life. Only three studies affirmed that parents were part of curriculum and calendar setting. Two of the studies were conducted in developed countries, while the third was carried out in an African nation. In the case of the latter study, parents only became involved in assisting with the structure of the curriculum because of their active participation in paying teachers' salaries, a responsibility they shouldered due to government delays and inadequate payments. In the studies conducted in less developed countries, it was observed that parents and community members were rarely invited by teachers to participate in curriculum development. Moreover, among those invited, some declined cooperation with the teachers, asserting that involvement in curriculum development was beyond their purview. This exclusion reflects systemic barriers within school governance and the educational system, where decision-making is often centralised in the hands of school authorities. It also highlights that cultural norms and institutional practices may undervalue the perspectives of parents and community members. The lack of inclusion undermines the potential for educational content to be adapted to local needs, contexts, and realities. Future research should therefore explore strategies that empower parents and community members to play meaningful roles in curriculum and school planning. Approaches such as participatory curriculum design, use of local languages, or recognition of Indigenous and community knowledge could help bridge the divide between formal schooling and rural realities.

Additionally, schools in rural areas often rely on community support for their learning environment. The review reveals that community members and parents assist in constructing and maintaining facilities but have low expectations regarding sanitation and wellbeing, as well as providing books and materials for the schools and learners. Concerning the learning environment, most studies were conducted in less developed countries/the global south. This suggests that communities in rural areas, especially in many developing countries, make considerable efforts to establish a conducive learning environment. (S1 Table) shows that, within the aspect of quality education, there are few studies focusing on parents' and the community's involvement in school management. Among the four subthemes under the school management theme, the review found that teacher training and the recruitment and termination of teachers received the least support from parents and community members. This indicates that parents and community members in rural areas have little or no influence over teachers' recruitment and the quality of education. Notably, only five studies examined these two subthemes, with two focusing on teacher training and three on teacher recruitment and termination, indicating a clear gap in the existing literature. Many studies confirm the active role of some parents and community members in teacher supervision and evaluation, supporting teacher incentives, and payment of salaries. This suggests that opportunities for meaningful participation are limited and unevenly distributed, and that in some contexts, parents accept a more passive role, highlighting the need for clearer structures and encouragement for active engagement in school governance.

Regarding the second question for the review, few studies were found on what facilitates and hinders parents' and community members' participation in quality edu-

cation. One of the most critical factors that encourages parent participation is communication. Communication is exchanged through written and oral forms by teachers and parents. These mediums created flexibility in appointments and allowed parents and community members to articulate their complaints and share information. These mediums of communication were less found in rural areas in African countries. In addition, there was not much literature to understand whether communication is a facilitator among parents and community members in rural areas of Africa countries. This suggests that effective communication is a key enabler of participation; however, its limited availability in rural African contexts may restrict meaningful engagement, highlighting a gap for future research to explore how communication strategies can support parental and community involvement.

From the scoping review, other factors that facilitated parents' and community members' engagement included how teachers and headteachers motivated and engaged parents and community members through roles, the respect they showed, and the training activities they provided to parents. What is more important for researchers in this category is that all the studies were conducted in these developed countries, except one in Kenya by Nishimura (2019). This indicates that teacher support, respect, and training are key enablers of engagement, but evidence is largely from developed contexts, highlighting a need to explore whether similar strategies work in developing countries, especially rural African settings

Despite the willingness of low-income parents and community members to be involved in their children's education, illiteracy remains the principal barrier to their participation. Participation is fraught with difficulty in assisting their children with academic achievement and understanding curricular information to help with homework. Furthermore, a lack of knowledge of the SMCS and VEC in the language used in meetings instilled fear and eroded confidence in making contributions. This indicates that even motivated parents face structural and personal barriers that limit meaningful engagement, suggesting that willingness alone is insufficient without support and capacity-building.

The papers reviewed in the study provide evidence of several barriers that prevent parents and the community in rural areas from being involved in their children's education. However, a gap exists in the lack of comprehensive solutions to address these barriers. The findings suggest that lack of time, poverty, lack of respect, and cultural and institutional barriers contribute to low levels of parent and community involvement in children's education in rural areas. These multiple, overlapping barriers highlight that parental and community engagement is influenced by economic, social, and cultural factors, not just individual motivation, and that interventions must address these dimensions simultaneously. Addressing these barriers will require a multi-faceted approach that considers the cultural, economic, and institutional factors at play. Future research is needed to determine practical solutions for increasing parent and community involvement in rural education.

Conclusions

This scoping review has bridged the empirical and policy-relevant gaps in the literature on quality education by systematically mapping how parents and communities contribute to rural primary schooling across different continents. Empirically, the review consolidated fragmented findings from 46 studies to reveal six interconnected elements of quality education: learner support, curriculum, learning environment, management, finance, and personnel. It shows that community and parental involvement are not limited to home-based activities but extend to school-based activities. Policy-wise, the synthesis demonstrates that inclusive and decentralised education governance, when aligned with local realities, enhances school functionality and children's outcomes in rural settings. The evidence highlights the need for policies that formally integrate parents and community members into decision-making and capacity-building initiatives. By doing so, the review provides a foundational evidence base for future empirical studies and policy reforms aimed at improving educational quality and equity in rural areas.

Limitation

By confining our search of studies to the English language, we narrow the scope of our investigation, thereby excluding insights from non-English sources. This decision may hinder our ability to encompass a comprehensive global perspective with regions with pertinent experience in decentralising education to the local levels. Furthermore, conducting our study in rural areas limited us to a few studies, thereby excluding potential comparisons with countries that share decentralisation practices.

Lastly, sticking to three databases could also result from the limited number of studies. Despite these limitations, the review makes a significant contribution by offering a comprehensive synthesis of evidence on parental and community involvement in rural education and by identifying clear research and policy directions for strengthening local participation in school governance and learning improvement. The study thus provides a vital platform for future investigations and for policymakers seeking to promote equitable and context-sensitive education reforms.

Appendix

Appendix A

This section contains Fig 1, a flowchart diagram that visualises the study selection process. It illustrates the process by which articles were screened and selected for inclusion in this scoping review.

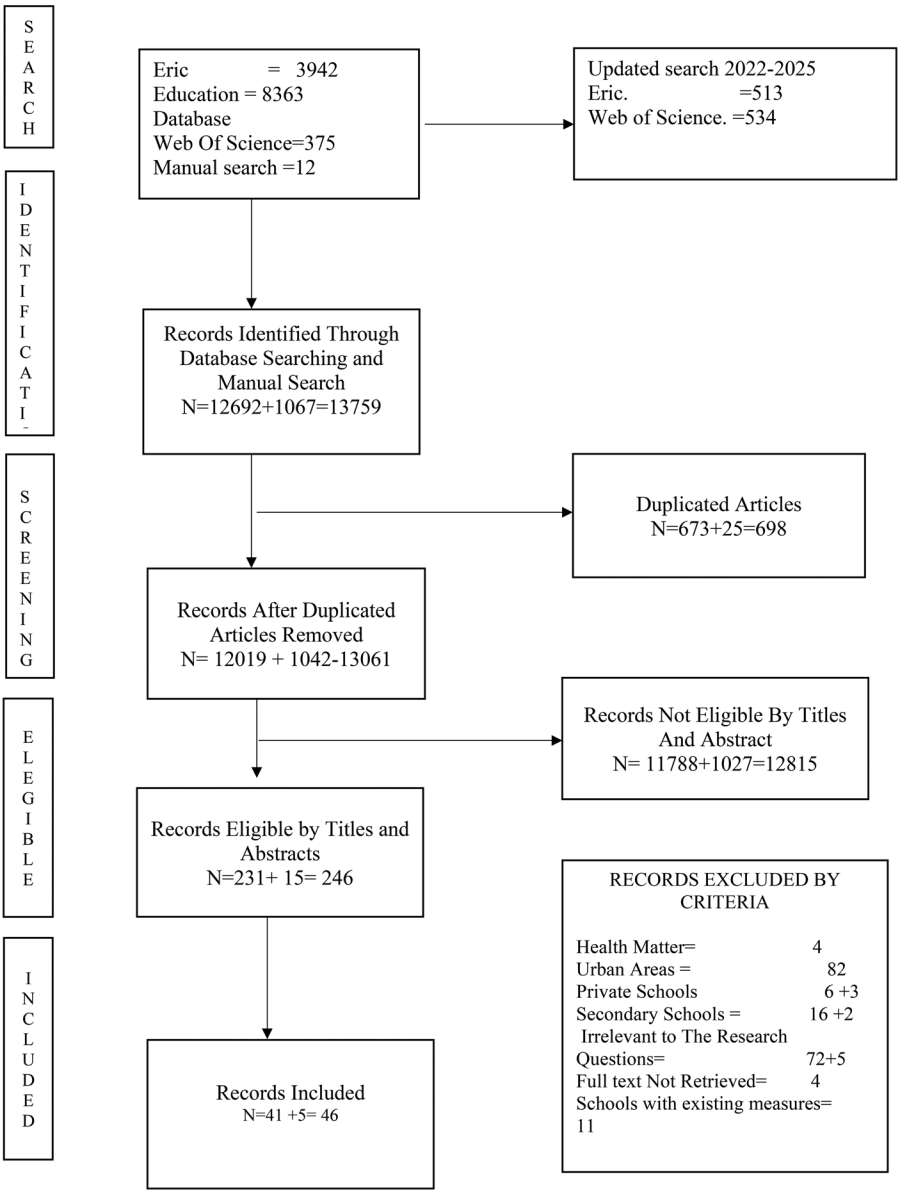

Fig. 1 Flowchart diagram of the screening and selection procedure

Appendix B

Figure 2 shows the distribution of studies by continent, highlighting the global representation of research on community and parent involvement in rural education.

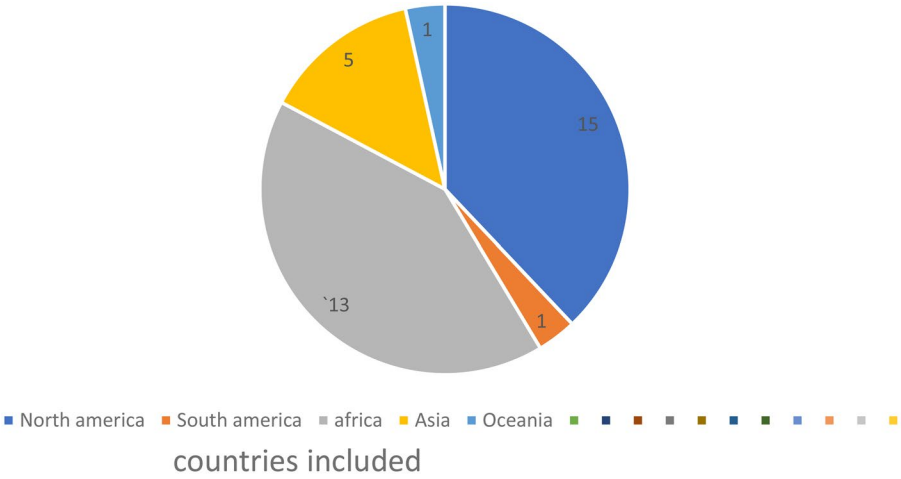

Fig. 2 Distribution of articles conducted in various continents

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Data availability The author confirms that all the data generated or analysed during this study are included in this published article. A large data file in Excel format is found in the supplementary document.

Declarations

Ethical approval Not applicable.

Consent to participate Not applicable.

Consent for publication Not applicable.

Competing interests On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author declares that there are no competing interests.

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